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SUBJECT: WOMEN'S NGO IN SE TURKEY CHANGING ATTITUDES ABOUT "HONOR"
KILLINGS

REF: ANKARA 5606

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Summary

1. (SBU) A women's non-governmental organization - KA-MER - has established centers throughout SE Turkey and is making impressive inroads against the practice of families killing women who have damaged their "honor." Although social attitudes remain regressive on this topic, KA-MER is influencing government approaches and has intervened to assist over 80 women facing domestic violence, and possible death in some cases. To address the issue in the long-term, KA-MER is focusing on education of women and all government agencies associated with safety and health. End summary.

"Honor" Killings and Women's Rights

2. (SBU) During a recent visit to Turkey's southeast, Adana PO and Ankara POLCOUNS met with representatives of KA-MER (Women's Center) in Diyarbakir and Batman. KA-MER is an NGO dedicated to combating "honor" killings (KA-MER calls them "killings committed under the guise of 'honor'"). Although KA-MER faces enormous social barriers, in less than ten years it has helped change the actions and attitude of government and law enforcement, and has intervened to save the lives of dozens of women. Together with other hopeful indicators of civil society's growth in the SE (septel), KA-MER is showing that the rapid social and economic change seen elsewhere in Turkey is also having an impact in the economically deprived southeast.

3. (SBU) Research commissioned by KA-MER shows that residents of the region continue to regard acts of adultery or "promiscuous" behavior by young women as violations of family "honor" and that such acts are serious enough to justify attacks on women or even murder. In many cases, women facing the prospect of these murders commit suicide or the murders themselves are passed off as suicides. According to media reports, the number of such deaths may be as high as 300 per year in Turkey.

Civil Society Responds

4. (SBU) KA-MER approaches the issue in two ways: for the long-term, it provides training, consultation and services to improve women's status. This includes classes for women informing them of their legal rights, counseling for those

experiencing domestic violence and assistance for those interested in starting businesses. KA-MER is also working with the police and village-level officials to raise awareness of domestic violence issues and offer their services when incidents occur. Diyarbakir office head (and KA-MER founder) Nebahat Akkoc noted that "honor" killings are not committed suddenly; the situation normally develops over weeks or months and people around the family are aware of the issue. She said that "kaymakams" (central government-appointed sub-governors who have contacts at the village-level) frequently call KA-MER saying they believe a killing is going to happen but don't know what to do - or that their hands are tied.

15. (SBU) Their plan, Akkoc explained, is eventually to create a triumverate of village headmen (muhtars), imams and teachers who can work as a team to help educate villagers and prevent killings. KA-MER has passed this idea to the central government. According to Akkoc, the Prime Minister's recently released circular on measures to decrease "honor killings" resulted from KA-MER feeding its ideas up the chain; the GOT does not explicitly acknowledge their authorship, but what matters is the result (reftel). Akkoc is hopeful that the circular may remove some of the barriers that have so frustrated sub-governors and others who have previously been unable to intervene to prevent such killings.

16. (SBU) KA-MER's second key role - crisis intervention - comes into play here. Over the last three years, the centers have assisted over 120 women who felt endangered in their homes, in some cases due to potential "honor" killings and in others due to abusive relationships. KA-MER has provided counseling, mediation with the families, material assistance and in some cases help resettling the victim to another part of Turkey. In two provinces, Diyarbakir and Mardin, KA-MER's efforts have prompted the establishment of "Emergency Intervention Teams" that include NGO's, government agencies and local religious officials.

Comment

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17. (SBU) KA-MER is tackling a problem that is extremely complex, involving deep-seated social practices and prejudices, a legal system that until recently turned a blind eye and difficult privacy questions. While far too many people continue to regard violence against women as acceptable behavior, KA-MER's work seems to be causing a paradigm shift in how Turkish officials deal with these issues. Akkoc acknowledged that, although KA-MER is now established in nearly all the provincial capitals of the southeast, it is often difficult for women in outlying villages to even know that such services are available. KA-MER plans additional expansion to smaller cities, but its representatives emphasize that expanded literacy and early childhood education are the most important long-term weapons to battle the conditions that result in these tragic deaths.
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